

CASO  
Atlas Asbestos

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT - BAKERSFIELD DISTRICT  
FACSIMILE MESSAGE

TO: Bernie Hyde

OFFICE: M.O. 707

Location Phone Number: 8-268-5517

SUBJECT: Clear Creek Management Area

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: Bernie - This letter was developed by the State, District and R.A. offices. We send it to those who have written us concerning BLM's future management of the Clear Creek Management Area. You may use it for your conversations with Congressman Morehead & others. You can call me if you have any questions.

NUMBER OF PAGES TO FOLLOW: 1

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## Stock Letter/Clear Creek

Thank you for your letter concerning the BLM's Clear Creek Management Area. This area, in San Benito and Fresno counties, covers about 48 square miles, and contains significant amounts of naturally occurring asbestos minerals.

Asbestos mining occurred in the area in the late 1960s and 1970s, but most of those operations are now closed (one mine is still active). In the meantime, numerous studies have determined that exposure to asbestos, in certain quantities, poses a legitimate public health hazard.

In 1980, elevated levels of asbestos were detected in water samples from the California aquaduct. This prompted Federal studies by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and BLM, beginning in 1983. The EPA and BLM concluded that some of these mines need to be reclaimed to reduce the amount of asbestos carried offsite by wind and water erosion. Two sites, the Atlas Mine and the Johns-Manville Coalinga facility, were added to the EPA's Superfund list.

In 1986, BLM issued a management plan for the Clear Creek area that included opportunities for public recreation, and those objectives were also included in an overall Hollister Resource Area Management Plan completed by BLM in 1984. However, both those plans acknowledged that the asbestos hazard existed and that additional studies were underway that might require changes in BLM's management approaches.

At present, EPA is in the final stages of preparing its Record of Decision that will determine what remedial actions are necessary. It is anticipated that EPA will require the BLM to find ways to minimize public exposure to asbestos in the area and require the responsible parties to prevent transport of asbestos from the site.

These constraints may result in restrictions of off-highway vehicle (OHV) and other uses and limitations on public access into the area. The public hearings held on the EPA proposals have resulted in significant concern expressed by recreation users about these potential restrictions. OHV representatives attending these hearings have suggested that BLM begin evaluating alternative sites in the vicinity for similar recreation use.

Although BLM is awaiting EPA's final ruling before proposing any plan amendments or other decisions, we are moving ahead on evaluating alternative OHV sites in the area, using funds made available by a State of California OHV Commission grant.

The results of BLM's studies will be included in the eventual Clear Creek Plan amendment. The identification of any new OHV use areas would depend on an assessment of land capability, evaluation of resource conflicts, and public input. All these evaluations include ample opportunity for public involvement and we would welcome any and all suggestions in addressing this legitimate problem.